

Mastery of Pre-Reading Skills (Vowels) of A Preschool Student Using the VOKAD Method

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Abstract

Reading skills are highly emphasized in the MOE Preschool Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document as they are crucial in developing students' oral communication and basic literacy throughout their schooling years. However, some preschool students struggle in mastering pre-reading skills (vowel letters) even after the first three months of instruction. As a result, they are also likely to lag behind their peers in mastering reading. Thus, an action research using the VoKad method was conducted to help improve the mastery of pre-reading skills (vowel letters) among preschool students who are struggling in reading as well as to help teachers in supporting students with these challenges. The researcher utilized the "edutainment" approach in this study which combines reading and singing techniques using the VoKad method. All instruction was carried out in the Malay language. Three teaching and learning activities were conducted over a period of one month. The findings of the study showed a very encouraging improvement in the first two weeks of intervention and the students successfully mastered all the vowel letters and sounds after four weeks of the study implementation. It is important to note that pre-reading skills do not only concern the mastery of vowels but also the skills of recognising and pronouncing consonants and segmenting open syllables. Therefore, the researchers suggest that future studies should also investigate and address students difficulty in mastering other pre-reading skills such as recognising and pronouncing consonants.

Keywords: Pre-reading Skills, Vowels, VOKAD Method

Introduction

The preschool education program, which is implemented in almost all National Schools throughout the country, is one of the efforts of the Ministry of Education Malaysia to provide opportunities for children aged four to six to get early exposure to informal education. One of the objectives of the preschool program is to develop students' oral communication and literacy foundations as a preparation for formal learning. In the KPM Preschool Curriculum and Assessment Standards Document (DSKP) (2017), language skills, particularly reading skills, are the core of the Communication Pillar. These reading skills start from the easy level

which is the mastery of pre-reading skills to the more difficult level which is the development of extensive wide reading. These skills are introduced in accordance to the age groups. However, there are some preschool children, even at the age of six, who have yet to master the skills at the lowest level, namely the skills of recognising letters (naming and sounding out vowels).

Teaching and Learning Reflection

After nearly three months of instruction from January to March, I found that one of my students from Karisma preschool class was still unable to recognise, name and sound out vowel letters. This was evident by the data obtained when I conducted a class assessment for vowel letters. In a writing exercise, Adam incorrectly matched initial vowel letters with their corresponding pictures based on the sound of the vowel letters. For example, the vowel letter 'a' with a picture of a chicken ('ayam' /ayam/). Based on the exercise, Adam could only match the letter 'o' with the image of a torch (/obor/). This shows that Adam only recognises and can only sound out the vowel 'o'. Adam's difficulty with vowels can be further evidenced by another writing exercise, in which Adam could only write the vowel letter 'o' in a box with a picture of a person (/orang/). In the oral test, it was found that Adam also had difficulty naming and sounding out all vowels except the letter 'o' and its short sound /o/. Adam also had difficulty distinguishing between letter names and letter sounds. Although Adam was able to pronounce the vowel letter 'e', Adam could not pronounce its corresponding sounds /ɛ/ or /ə/ correctly. As a result, Adam used the name of the letter 'e' (pronounced /i:/) as the initial letter of fish (ikan /i:kan/) instead of the letter 'i' (pronounced /ai/). Thus, he incorrectly identified/spelled 'ikan' as 'ekan'.

Table 1

Analysis of incorrect matching between vowel letters and their corresponding pictures

No.	Writing Practice (Match the vowel letters with the correct pictures)	Score
1	Matching the vowel letter a to the picture of a chicken (/ayam/)	X
2	Matching the vowel letter e to the picture of a tail (/ekor/)	X
3	Matching the vowel letter i to the picture of a fish (/i:kan/)	X
4	Matching the vowel letter e to the picture of a mother (/əmak/)	X
5	Matching the vowel letter o to the picture of a brain (/otak/)	/
6	Matching the vowel letter u to the picture of a snake (/ular/)	X
	Total score	1/6

Table 2

Analysis of the frequency of naming and sounding out vowels correctly

No.	Oral test (Naming and sounding out vowels)	Naming	Sounding out
1	Naming the letter and sounding out a	X	X
2	Naming the letter and sounding out i	X	X
3	Naming the letter and sounding out e (<i>pepet</i>) and e (<i>taling</i>)	/	X
4	Naming the letter and sounding out o	/	/
5	Naming the letter and sounding out u	x	X
		2/5	1/6
		Naming and sounding out	
	Total score	1/6	

Research Focus

For preschool students, the acquisition of pre-reading skills are the first step toward reading mastery. These pre-reading skills include recognising and naming all consonant and vowel letters, sounding out all vowels and consonants, as well as segmenting syllables. However, for the purpose of this study, only the mastery of vowels was investigated. This is considering the importance of pre-reading skills; in the case of the Malay language, the ability to name and sound out vowels; as a foundation for a successful reading experience. Based on the researcher's observations, she identified four problems or difficulties faced by the preschool student, namely:

1. Difficulty in naming the vowels **a, i, u**
2. Difficulty in sounding out the vowels **a, e, i, u**
3. Difficulty in differentiating between the name of the vowels and the sounds they make (confusion with **i** and **e**)

By using an appropriate approach and interesting methods in helping Adam to master the vowel letters, the researcher was confident that Adam will be more interested and confident in his learning. Consequently, Adam can master the next pre-reading skills and be able to at least read two-syllable words, thus allowing him to be better prepared to move on to year one later.

Research Objective*General Objective*

- i. The student will be able to master pre-reading skills (vowels) using the VoKad method.

Specific Objective

- i. Recognise and name the vowels **a, i, u**
- ii. Sound out the vowels **a, e, i, u**
- iii. Differentiate between the name of vowels and their corresponding sounds (confusion with **i** and **e**)

Target Participants

This research only involves one student from the Karisma preschool class in one of the schools in the Hulu Langat district. The researcher decided to conduct the study with this student to help him improve his pre-reading skills using the VoKad method.

Literature Review

A preliminary survey found that a student has not been able to master the skills of naming and sounding out vowels correctly. To overcome the problems faced by this student, the researcher utilised "edutainment" approach which combines reading and singing techniques called the "VoKad" method.

A study conducted by (Razak & Masitah, 2015) found that "edutainment" approach can increase student motivation, interest and overall involvement, while creating a fun and conducive environment for teaching and learning.

Based on (Jamian, 2016) study, edutainment strategies used in teaching Malay can improve essay writing.

In (Halim, 2020) study, the findings of pre and post-test analysis as well as interviews showed that there was an increase in knowledge and 3M skills (reading, writing, counting), in addition to interest through various fun activities.

(Ramlah, 2016) in her study explained that the majority of preschool teachers found edutainment easy to implement and the students enjoyed it. The teachers believed that entertaining pedagogical methods are effective in improving literacy skills among preschool children.

The findings from previous studies lend support to the notion that combining learning activities with entertainment is effective in improving students' knowledge and skills in various subjects or learning areas.

Research Methodology

VoKad is a combination of the words 'Vowel' and 'Card'. The researcher got the idea of combining these words because in the technique she used, she incorporated entertainment by combining the singing of vowel letters simultaneously while showing vowel cards. She introduced the "VoKad" technique to Adam in a special learning session conducted daily before the start of formal schooling time. The target period of the study is 4 weeks or equivalent to 20 school days. This study is a quantitative study and the findings are shown in the form of scores.

Activities Carried Out

- i. "Letters and Vowel Sounds" Song

The "Letters and Vowel Sounds" song was created with a melodic composition that is easy to follow by Adam. By memorising the melody, Adam is indirectly expected to be able to name and sound out the vowels correctly even though he has not yet recognised the vowel letters.

(Activity target: Listening repeatedly to memorise)

Lyrics

a a a a.

i i i i.

e e e e... (e pepet sound)

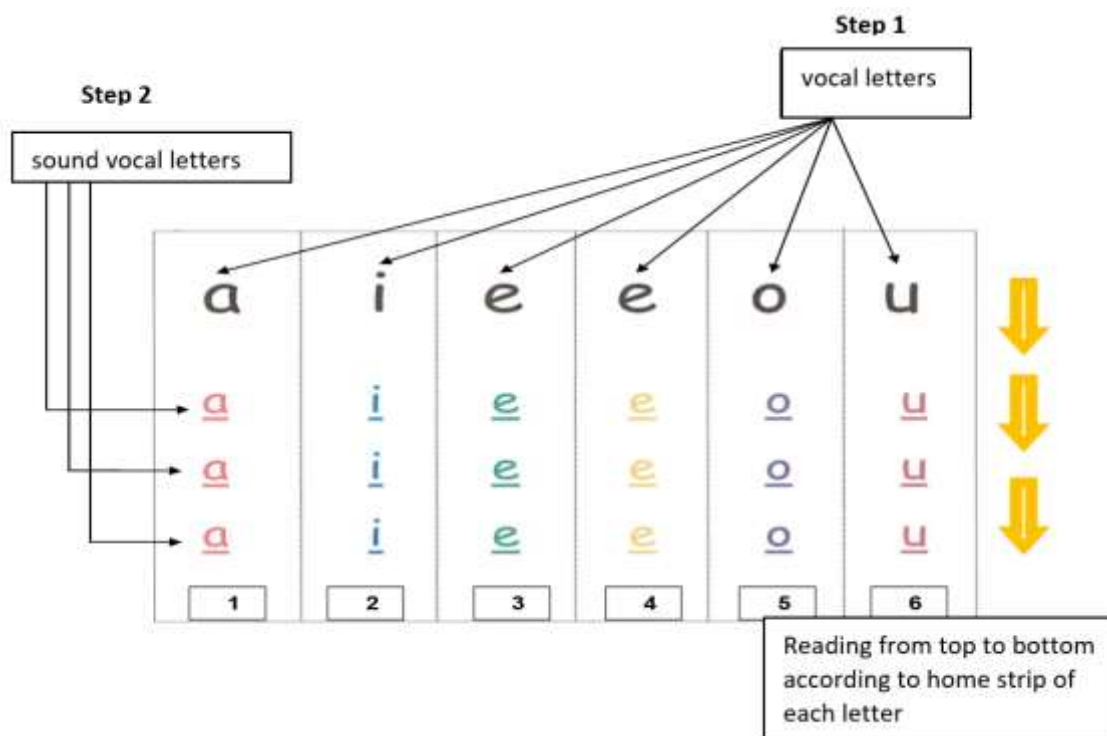
e e e e... (e taling sound)

o o o o...

u u u u...

itu huruf dan bunyi vokal (those are the vowel sounds).

ii. Letter Cards and Vowel Sounds "VoKad"



How to Read "VoKad"

1. The index finger is ready.
2. Point while saying the letters at the top (in black) and sound out the letters at the bottom (in different colours) 3 times. (Repeat activity for each line until completed).

How to Sing "VoKad"

1. Use the same reading method as above. The song is accompanied by the music of the VoKad song.
 2. The index finger is ready.
- Point while singing the letters at the top (in black) and sounding out the colored letters at the bottom 3 times according to the melody of the song.
(Repeat activity for each line until completed).

Activity target: Repetitively reading or singing while the index finger points to each letter and sound is expected to strengthen the recognition of vowel letters and their sounds.

Follow the steps in the table below

Table 3

Steps in using the VoKad method

Step 1	<p>Activity 1 Listen to the vowel song (VoKad) and sing together <i>a. Student listens to the VoKad song.</i> <i>b. Student listens to the VoKad song repeatedly to memorise it.</i></p> <p><i>(This activity was only conducted once in the first session to familiarise the student with the song). Date: 1 April 2019</i></p>
Step 2	<p>Activity 2 Sing the vowel song using the Vokad method <i>a. Student observes the teacher singing the vowel song using VoKad.</i> <i>b. Teacher demonstrates the VoKad technique while singing.</i> <i>c. Student sings while showing the vowel cards and sounding them out using the VoKad technique.</i></p> <p><i>(Students repeats activity c until he can sing the song on his own without music).</i></p>
Step 3	<p>Activity 3 Name and sound out vowels using the VoKad method without music <i>a. Student is guided to name and sound out vowels using VoKad.</i> <i>b. Students names and sounds out vowels using Vokad independently without teacher's guidance.</i></p> <p><i>(If the student is not able to do activity b independently, he will try again the next day until the end of the study period).</i></p>

Findings and Discussion**Research Reflection**

Student performance evaluation after intervention

- a) Adam's oral test performance after intervention

Table 4

Oral Test Scores

No.	Oral Test (Naming and sounding out vowels)	Naming
1	Naming and sounding out the vowel a	/
2	Naming and sounding out the vowel i	/
3	Naming and sounding out the vowel e (<i>pepet</i>) and e (<i>taling</i>)	/
4	Naming and sounding out the vowel o	/
5	Naming and sounding out the vowel u	/
Total score		5/5
		Naming and sounding out
		6/6

Table 4 shows that Adam obtained a perfect score of 6/6 in the skills of naming and sounding out vowels at the end of the oral test compared to a score of 1/6 prior to the intervention. This means that by achieving a score of 100%, Adam has successfully mastered the skills of naming and sounding out vowels.

- b) Adam's writing performance after intervention

To ensure that Adam has fully mastered the targetted pre-reading skills (vowel letters), several written tests with different types of questions were administered. The variability and frequency of the test were as such to determine that Adam's acquisition or mastery of the skills is really the result of the intervention.

Table 5

Writing Test I Scores

No.	Writing Practice (Match the vowel letters with the correct pictures)	Score
1	Matching the vowel letter a to the picture of a chicken (<i>/ayam/</i>)	/
2	Matching the vowel letter e to the picture of a tail (<i>/ekor/</i>)	/
3	Matching the vowel letter i to the picture of a fish (<i>/i:kan/</i>)	/
4	Matching the vowel letter e to the picture of a mother (<i>/amak/</i>)	/
5	Matching the vowel letter o to the picture of a brain (<i>/otak/</i>)	/
6	Matching the vowel letter u to the picture of a snake (<i>/ular/</i>)	/
Total score		6/6

Table 5 shows that Adam successfully scored 6/6 for writing test I (matching initial vowel letters with the correct pictures) after going through the intervention, compared to the 1/6 score prior.

Table 6

Writing Test II Scores

No.	Writing Practice (Match the vowel letters with the correct pictures)	Score
1	Writing the vowel letter a in the box with a picture of fire (/api/)	/
2	Writing the vowel letter e in the box with a picture of an apple (/ɛpal/)	/
3	Writing the vowel letter i in the box with a picture of a duck (/itik/)	/
4	Writing the vowel letter e in the box with a picture of a mother (/mak/)	/
5	Writing the vowel letter o in the box with a picture of a torch (/obor/)	/
6	Writing the vowel letter u in the box with a picture of a snake (/ular/)	/
7	Writing the vowel letter o in the box with a picture of a brain (/otak/)	/
8	Writing the vowel letter a in the box with a picture of a chicken (/ayam/)	/
9	Writing the vowel letter e in the box with a picture of the number six (/ənam/)	/
10	Writing the vowel letter i in the box with a picture of a fish (/i:kan/)	/
11	Writing the vowel letter u in the box with a picture of a bug (/ulat/)	/
12	Writing the vowel letter a in the box with a picture of clouds (/awan/)	/
	Jumlah skor	12/12

Table 6 shows that Adam obtained a perfect score of 12/12 for Writing Test II (writing the initial vowel letter for each picture) at the conclusion of the intervention. Clearly Adam has fully mastered vowels.

Table 7

Scores for Writing Test III

No.	Writing Practice (Writing letters based on sounds)		Score
	Vowel sound (teacher sounding out the vowels)	Student writing letters based on sounds	/
1	e (<i>pepet</i>)	e	/
2	u	u	/
3	i	i	/
4	a	a	/
5	o	o	/
6	e (<i>taling</i>)	e	/
	Total score		6/6


Table 7 shows that Adam successfully obtained a perfect score of 6/6 for writing test III (writing letters based on sounds) after going through the intervention. Adam's performance in this activity convinced the researcher that Adam was not only able to recognise, name and sound out vowels, but also write all vowel letters based on their corresponding sounds.

Summary of Observation of the Activities

Adam's progress in the VoKad singing and reading activities													
Date	a		i		e <i>pepet</i>		e <i>taling</i>		o		u		
	s	b	s	b	s	b	s	b	s	b	s	b	
Day 1 4/4	x	x	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Singing</i>
	x	x	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Reading</i>
Day 2 5/4	x	/	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Singing</i>
	x	x	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Reading</i>
Day 3 6/4	x	/	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Singing</i>
	x	x	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Reading</i>
Day 4 7/4	x	/	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Singing</i>
	x	x	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Reading</i>
Day 5 8/4	x	/	x	/		x		x			x	/	<i>Singing</i>
	x	/	x	x		x		x			x	x	<i>Reading</i>
Day 6 11/4	x	/	x	/		x		x			x	/	<i>Singing</i>
	x	/	x	x		x		x			x	/	<i>Reading</i>
Day 7 12/4	x	/	x	/		x		x			x	/	<i>Singing</i>
	x	/	x	x		x		x			x	/	<i>Reading</i>
Day 8 13/4	x	/	x	/		/		/			x	/	<i>Singing</i>
	x	/	x	x		x		x			x	/	<i>Reading</i>
Day 9	x	/	x	/		/		/			x	/	<i>Singing</i>

Adam’s progress in the VoKad singing and reading activities													
Date	a		i		e pepet		e taling		o		u		
	s	b	s	b	s	b	s	b	s	b	s	b	
14/4	x	/	x	x		/		/			x	/	Reading
Day 10	x	/	x	/		/		/			x	/	Singing
15/4	x	/	x	x		/		/			x	/	Reading
Day 11	x	/	x	/		/		/			x	/	Singing
18/4	x	/	x	x		/		/			x	/	Reading
Day 12	/	/	x	/		/		/			x	/	Singing
19/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			x	/	Reading
Day 13	/	/	x	/		/		/			x	/	Singing
20/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			x	/	Reading
Day 14	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Singing
21/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			x	/	Reading
Day 15	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Singing
22/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Reading
Day 16	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Singing
25/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Reading
Day 17	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Singing
26/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Reading
Day 18	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Singing
27/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Reading
Day 19	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Singing
28/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Reading
Day 20	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Singing
29/4	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	Reading

Note:

- 1)  = mastered prior to intervention
- 2) s = sebut (name)
b = bunyi (sound out)
- 3) / = telah menguasai (have mastered)
x = belum menguasai (have yet to master/developing)

Based on the findings of the study, Adam began to show improvement on the 5th day when he was able to sound out the vowel 'a'. In the beginning, Adam could not name or pronounce the letter 'a' but was able to do so after the teacher demonstrated how to pronounce the letter 'a' first. This continued until the next day few days. Finally on the 12th day, Adam managed to simultaneously name and sound out the vowel letter 'a' without the teacher's guidance. Although Adam was able to sound out the vowel 'a' seven days earlier than naming the vowel letter, the researcher is confident that the edutainment approach applied in the VoKad method greatly helped Adam's development. This is because Adam was able to

memorise sounds through the daily repetition of singing the VoKad song. Adam's progress continued to be seen on day 6 when Adam was able to sound out the vowel 'u' even though he was not yet able to pronounce the letter name first. This pattern was similar to when Adam went through the process of mastering the vowel letter 'a'. The researcher was increasingly convinced that this form of development occurred as a result of repeated VoKad singing activity. Adam fully mastered the vowel letter 'u' on the 15th day of intervention when he was able to name the vowel letter 'u' and sound it out simultaneously. Adam was able to sound out the vowel 'u' nine days earlier than naming the letter. Although Adam's development did not follow the usual order of naming the vowel letters first before sounding them out, it was not considered an issue. This is because what is important is overall mastery i.e. Adam is able to pronounce and sound out the vowel letters simultaneously.

On the 9th day, Adam further progressed when he was able to master the skill of sounding out the vowels *e pepet* and *e taling* simultaneously. As explained in the previous section, Adam could already name the letter 'e' even before the intervention was carried out. Thus, the table shows that Adam has mastered naming the vowel letter 'e' as early as the first day. In the beginning, Adam seemed to have difficulty remembering the sounds of *e pepet* and *e taling*. Based on the researcher's observation, Adam could remember the sounds of the vowel 'e' during the singing activity, but was not able to do so during the VoKad reading activity. This shows that when there was an element of music, he was better able to retain his learning and conversely struggled when he was only required to read the vowels and their sounds. However, with repetition Adam finally managed to master the skills of naming and sounding out the vowel *e pepet* and *e taling* correctly.

For the skills of naming and sounding out the vowel letter 'i', Adam's mastery can be seen on the 12th day similar to his attainment of naming and sounding out the letter 'a'. Although Adam's mastery in naming and sounding out the vowel letter 'i' was a little slow, it was still commendable as he acquired both these skills simultaneously on the 12th day of intervention.

In conclusion, the intervention carried out with Adam in an effort to improve his mastery of pre-reading skills (vowel letters) was successful. This is because Adam was not only able to fully master the vowel letters, but he did so 5 days earlier than the scheduled intervention deadline.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall Conclusion

Overall, based on the researcher's observations on the findings obtained, it can be concluded that Adam has shown a very encouraging improvement. Adam has fully mastered vowels i.e. naming the letters and sounding them out correctly by the 15th day, 5 days earlier than when the intervention was supposed to end on the 20th day which was equivalent to 4 weeks of the study period. In conclusion, the intervention carried out with Adam to improve his mastery of pre-reading skills (vowel letters) was a success.

Future Recommendations

Overall, considering the success of the action research conducted with Adam, the researcher will continue to use this VoKad technique in the future. This method should be continued to ensure all students receive proper, explicit and fun phonics instruction before they move to formal primary education in year one. This is because to master reading, students should

master pre-reading skills, which not only include the mastery of all vowel letters (pronunciation and sound) but also recognising and pronouncing consonants and segmenting open syllables. However, the progress observed in the action research conducted with Adam was limited to the naming and sounding out of the vowel letters only. Therefore, the researcher suggests that future action research should work with students who are struggling or have difficulty in the mastery of other pre-reading skills such as recognising, naming and sounding out consonant letters and [... add another example of pre-reading skills].

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